

## **A Voter's Guide: Part I**

Selected from Genesis 39-45

I think you would have to be marooned on a desert island not to know that we're in the midst of a big national election. TV commercials pitting one candidate against another are matched with news talk shows constantly analyzing every word and action potential office holders make as they push to get elected. There's so much of it in fact that if you're like me, there are days when you wish it was all over.

And yet as irritating as the ads and analysis may be, I think we all realize how important these elections are for the future of our community, state, nation, and world. So we need to be involved in the process, and we need to make wise decisions when we enter the ballot booths this November.

With that said, I thought it might be helpful for us to talk about the kind of qualities we should be looking for in leaders as we consider each candidate for public office. In doing so, I want to assure you that I have no political agenda here. I'm not advocating for one candidate over another or one party over another. The issues we need to talk about transcend these partisan differences.

To help us with this, we're going to take a couple of weeks looking at the life of Joseph who held a position of great authority in Egypt during a time of national crisis. The qualities we see in him are the same kind of qualities that we should look for when we examine candidates for office today.

That doesn't mean that unless we see each and every quality in a candidate that we should refuse to vote for anybody. Rarely is anyone going to rise to the standard we'll see in Joseph's life. Nevertheless, the more we see these qualities in a candidate, the more confident we can be that such a person will act responsibly and appropriately should he or she be elected.

Finally, the qualities we will see in Joseph remind us that the character of a candidate is far more important than the words they say or the positions they may take on any number of issues. Character comes from the core of who a person is and reflects how they will act in the future about issues that aren't currently being discussed and how they will manage the power they have to set public policy.

So let's look at the first three qualities we need to see in leaders as we try to put together a voter's guide for the upcoming elections.

## **I. We need to vote for leaders who maintain moral integrity.**

Anyone familiar with the story of Joseph knows that shortly after arriving in Egypt he was put in charge of the household of a prominent Egyptian family. Potiphar trusted Joseph completely and for good reason. Joseph was a man of great moral integrity. That integrity was put to the test when Potiphar's wife made a pass at him.

Rather than giving into this temptation, Joseph fled the house. He had no intention of violating the trust that had been placed in him or dishonoring God. Sadly, however, Mrs. Potiphar, who was morally bankrupt, lied about what happened which resulted in Joseph being thrown in prison. Even then there is no indication that Joseph regretted his decision to act with integrity. He refused to violate the trust that was given him even at great personal cost.

It reminds me of the story of golfer Davis Love III who called a one stroke penalty on himself during the 1994 Western Open Championship. It seems that Love had moved his marker on the green to get out of the way of another player's putting line. One or two holes later he couldn't remember if he had moved his ball back to the original spot, so he gave himself a stroke penalty.

As it turned out, that penalty caused him to miss the cut by one stroke leaving him a few hundred dollars short in season earnings of being eligible to play in the next year's Master's Tournament. If he hadn't called a penalty on himself, he would have earned enough money to qualify even if he had come in last. As it was, he would now have to win another tournament to be able to play in the Master's.

When asked if this situation bothered him, Love's reply said it all, "How would I feel if I had won the Master's and wondered for the rest of my life if I cheated to get in?"

That my friends is what I mean by integrity. And by the way, Love did win a tournament just in time to qualify for the Master's where he came in second.

When we cast our votes this November, we need to be looking for people who have demonstrated that kind of moral integrity. And by integrity, I mean such things as marital faithfulness, financial responsibility, and honesty in word and deed. It matters not the positions candidates hold, if they don't have moral integrity, then we need to question the wisdom of giving them our vote.

## **II. We need to vote for leaders who persevere under pressure.**

As we said, Joseph was falsely accused of improper advances toward Potiphar's wife which resulted in his imprisonment. Talk about pressure. One can only imagine the many feelings he must have had knowing that he had done nothing wrong and yet had been sent to prison because of the moral bankruptcy of someone in power.

It no doubt brought back to mind the unjust treatment he received at the hands of his brothers, who would have murdered him if a caravan of merchants had not been willing to buy him. Being sold into slavery is what put him in this position in the first place.

And yet during the entire time he was in prison there's no indication that he allowed these pressures to turn him into a bitter person or cause him to abandon his spiritual principles. In other words Joseph knew how to persevere under pressure. And that's a good thing, for there would soon come a time when he would need to be strong under pressure in order to lead a nation to prepare for an upcoming crisis.

What an important reminder this is for us today. In our modern world there are intense pressures on our elected leaders especially those on the national level who have unimaginable issues to deal with that impact people all over the world. So we need leaders who have demonstrated that when the pressure is on that they are able to maintain self-control and stay true to their core principles.

We see this persevering spirit in former president Abraham Lincoln who railed against slavery at a time when it wasn't popular to do so. While campaigning for a senate seat in 1854, Lincoln stated his the following attitude toward slavery. "I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our ...example of ... just influence in the world."

Lincoln wasn't elected to the Senate that year but that did not deter him in the least in his battle against this great social injustice. That battle contributed greatly to his election as president in 1860 despite the widespread hatred against him from southerners who referred to him with such derogatory terms as the "Orangutan In The White House" and the "Abolitionist Emperor."

But once again this didn't deter Lincoln from his mission. Nor did the criticism from political moderates who wanted to work out a compromise of creating an arrangement of free-states and slave states in order to avoid a civil war. Though tempted, Lincoln pressed on stating, "Entertain no

compromise in regard to the extension of slavery. The instant you do, they [will] have us under again; all our labor is lost, and sooner or later [it] must be done over. . . . Have none of it.”

Later when it became clear that the war between the states would soon be over, Lincoln began developing a plan to heal the nation’s wounds despite the intense hatred of the south by the victorious northerners. But in typical fashion, Lincoln pressed for what he knew was right. Shortly before his untimely assassination, Lincoln stated his policy:

*“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”*

Clearly Abraham Lincoln was a person who knew how to persevere under pressure.

And that same quality needs to be seen in today’s elected leaders. We live in a day when extreme political pressure is applied against our governmental leaders from both sides of the aisle and beyond. No matter what direction they take, there are voices ready to denounce them at every turn. That’s why we need to elect those who have shown that they are able to stay true to their principles in the face of such withering pressure. I’m not advocating a hard-headed unyieldedness to good advice, but the presence of a resolute spirit that doesn’t bow to threats or acts of intimidation.

So when you vote this fall, look for those candidates that show the ability to persevere under pressure.

### **III. We need to vote for leaders who demonstrate spiritual maturity.**

Joseph was in jail with two other political prisoners: the king’s cupbearer and his chief baker. Apparently, they had done something that brought the ire of their leader upon them resulting in them being put in the same place where Joseph was. While there, Joseph was able to correctly interpret dreams that both men had. One was restored to his former position and the other was put to death just like Joseph said.

Later when the Pharaoh himself was troubled by a persistent dream, the cupbearer who had been restored to his position remembered Joseph who was still languishing in prison. So Pharaoh sent for Joseph and told him that he understood that he was able to interpret dreams. Listen to Joseph’s

response and his demonstration of spiritual maturity: "It is not me, God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

You see, Joseph was wise enough to understand his dependency on God. Any ability he had come from the Lord and if he was to be successful in the future, he would need to maintain that dependency.

That's just one example of the kind of spiritual maturity we need to see in our leaders. We live in a tough world where there are dangers at every turn. So we need leaders who demonstrate the spiritual maturity of godly wisdom and moral courage.

It was that kind of wisdom that prompted colonial patriot Patrick Henry to state in 1765: "It cannot be emphasized too clearly and too often that this nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religion, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ. For this very reason, peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here."

We see the same wisdom in the words of James Madison, fourth president of the United States: "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We've staked the future of all our political institutions upon our capacity...to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."

Finally, listen to the spiritual maturity of George Washington at Valley Forge in 1778. "To the distinguished character of patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian."

Imagine what it would be if we elected leaders in our day who demonstrated that kind of spiritual maturity. Sadly, however, it seems that in today's increasingly secular world, there are fewer and fewer such leaders. Therefore, we need to pray that God would raise up the kind of leaders we need who do have spiritual maturity not to use their office to coerce anyone in matters of faith, but to use their faith as a guiding beacon in the never ending storms of life.

Yes, these are the kind of leaders we need to be voting for this fall. But let us not stop there. For as surely as we need to see these qualities in our leaders' lives, we need to be demonstrating them in our own lives.

We need to be a people who maintain moral integrity. We need to be a people who persevere under pressure. We need to be a people who demonstrate spiritual maturity. For the future of our nation rests not only on the qualities found in its leaders, but also on the qualities found in its citizens. Let us resolve then to be such good citizens and renew our commitment to truly be God's people in our country and in our world.